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Director's Message - Navy BHDP Integrates Technology and Mental Health Care

**By Capt. Scott L. Johnston, Ph.D, ABPP
MSC, USN
Director, NCCOSC**

As we begin a new year and I look back on 2015, I am so proud of all that the NCCOSC team accomplished. One of our largest initiatives was the successful design and deployment of the Navy Behavioral Health Data Portal (BHDP). BHDP is a web-based clinical practice tool that captures patient self-reported data and presents real-time information on a dashboard for providers to use in their clinical care. This program is improving the quality of care delivered to our Marines and Sailors.

Our team has worked to customize the tool to best suit the needs and culture of the Navy and Marine Corps. The resulting program makes effectual use of technology by providing the following:

- Utilization of outcome measures to better understand the patient
- Improved assistance for providers in diagnosis and treatment planning
- Automated follow-up and reassessments improving the effectiveness of patient care
- Improved coordination within and across mental health clinics



NEWPORT, R.I. - Capt. Scott Johnston, director, Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control (NCCOSC), discusses Navy Behavioral Health Data Portal (BHDP) with providers and staff at Naval Health Clinic New England in January. A team from NCCOSC travels to Navy medicine military treatment facilities and clinics to implement the new tool, give live demonstrations and train providers and staff. Navy BHDP is a web-based clinical practice tool for mental health providers to use in their patient care and will be implemented across the Navy medicine enterprise.

Navy BHDP allows providers access to comprehensive and standardized patient information, improving the continuation of care as a Sailor or Marine moves between duty stations. Standardized intake and follow



HOW THE USE OF WORK-PLACE TECHNOLOGY CAN AFFECT STRESS LEVELS

Modern technology has done wonders in recent years. For Navy medicine, it has advanced research, patient care, and health care delivery. Technology has now become so accessible that most tasks can now be accomplished in the palm of our hand, more specifically a smartphone or tablet.

As a whole, research has shown that information communications technology is perceived by most users as a positive tool. However, there are examples in which people do not manage usage as well as they could. Academic literature and popular press suggest information communication technologies can be responsible for increased stress levels in individuals, known as “technostress.” The term was coined in 1984 by clinical psychologist Craig Brod, who defined it as a modern disease caused by one’s inability to cope or adapt to information communication technologies in a healthy manner. Information communication technologies include Internet, smart phones, laptops, voicemails, emails, videoconferencing, teleconferencing and other work-specific technologies.

...individuals may feel tethered to these technologies and experience intrusion on their time, energy, and space.

About 80% of the respondents in one study felt that workplace technology has made their work more stressful through system problems and errors, steep technology-related learning curves, and higher technology-use related workload. (Tarafdar, Tu, & Ragu-Nathan, 2011) Technology removes the obstacle of distance and allows us to connect almost anywhere at any time. For providers and service members, the regular work day may be extended, and often times, work is brought home. While constant connectivity might have benefits for some, it also comes at the cost of blurring the boundary between work and home life by providing

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

TAKING MATTERS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS... ‘WHAT WILL YOU DO IN THE NEW YEAR TO COMBAT STRESS?’

Stress is a part of life, but if not managed properly it can lead to serious physical and mental health problems. Stress is an individual’s reaction to events that disrupt the balance in one’s life. How a person responds to those imbalances dictates to what degree the stress is felt.

Some useful ways to minimize the impact of stressful situations include making a conscious effort to calm your mind, stretch and breathe deeply. Maintain a clear mind, explore your options and chose a course of action... and carry it out.

Understanding that stress is natural and proactively taking steps to combat it will start you off on the right foot in the New Year. We recently had the opportunity to talk to some of the providers at the Naval Branch Health Clinic on Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, and they shared their strategies and advice for combatting stress in the New Year.



LT Elijah Burbank

General Medical Officer

What I will do personally to combat stress in the New Year is continue to reach out to my family and friends, to talk to them, to tell them when I have stressors to discuss, options for relieving those stressors, and ways to deal with things that I

can’t change in my life. What I would suggest that my patients do is to do the same. If you have a stressor it’s always best to have a sounding board, somebody to discuss that stressor with. If you don’t have somebody that you feel that you could discuss that stressor with, you could always reach out to either the chaplain of your command, your medical officer or the counseling center here on base.

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increased access to work and to individuals.

Mobile technology devices used in conjunction with social networking and collaborative applications make it possible to process simultaneous streams of real-time information. This process commonly results in information overload, interruptions, and multitasking. Due to the stressor of continual connectivity, individuals may feel tethered to these technologies and experience intrusion on their time, energy, and space. Hence, they experience stress. If not mitigated, stress can contribute to a number of physical and mental health problems for service members, providers, and their families.

To maintain a healthy technology balance, try to implement the following tips into your use of information communications technology.

Learn moderation. Make a note of how many times a day you check your email, or how many times you scan your social networking sites. Realize when you may be too reliant on technology, and take steps to reduce time spent on your devices.

Turn off your devices for shorts periods of time. Mealtimes, during exercise and family time are examples of when you can turn off your devices.



Devise a "not-to-do list." For instance, don't check email, social networks, etc., before or after a certain time of day. It is especially important to avoid checking your electronic devices before bedtime as it can affect your sleep.

Accept the fact you can't respond to 500 emails a day. Make peace with the fact that you need time to take care of yourself and "unplug."

Tarafdar, M., Tu, Q., & and Ragu-Nathan, T. (2011). Crossing to the Dark Side: Examining Creators, Outcomes, and Inhibitors of Technostress. Communications of the ACM, 54(9), 113-120.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

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HM3 Joshua Dover

General Duty Corpsman

For the New Year I plan on reaching out to the Marines and Sailors in the barracks; providing them with education on self-referral to behavioral health, Military One Source, and on-base options, as well as making myself available to talk to when they

feel that they are being pushed to the limit of stress.



LT Genevieve Dowling

General Medical Officer

In the New Year to combat stress I suggest for myself and for others to spend time with people you love, such as family and friends.



HMC Eulogio Gutierrez

*Senior Enlisted Leader
 Independent Duty Corpsman*

Sometimes you have to ask for help. Everybody has [the perception that], if 'I go to medical it's a sign of weakness,' or if 'I go ask for help I can't handle anything, especially combat stress.' So, as the

provider, I'm a patient, too; we as the advocate have to step back [and ask] who's going to take care of us? [We've] got to [practice] what we teach, so if we tell our Marines, 'Hey, go ask for help,' at the same time, we should do the same thing, too.



HM1 Meghan Halisky

Surface Force Independent Duty Corpsman

In the New Year I plan on engaging patients more directly in healthy lifestyle discussions as well as encouraging early stress reduction through progressive muscle relaxation and calming breathing techniques and by making information more

available in the examination room, like handouts and educational flyers.

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Meditation Meets Technology

The New Year is upon us and that often means taking on a New Year's resolution. For some, that might mean working toward being physically healthy. For others, it may mean taking a step toward better mental health. There are a variety of approaches from traditional psychological methods to holistic and alternative treatments. A growing body of evidence suggests that some holistic treatments are useful in relieving stress and building resilience. One such exercise is the practice of mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness meditation is the nonjudgmental awareness of the thoughts and feelings happening in your mind. The goal of a mindfulness program is to help improve well-being and learn to better regulate emotions. Instead of focusing on negative feelings, people learn to experience these feelings as temporary impulses that will pass.

Most commonly, meditation involves sitting quietly and clearing your mind. Sitting quietly for a few minutes a day may not sound difficult, but most people often struggle to quiet their minds. Many beginners start with "mindfulness meditation" which involves concentrating on the breath or using other techniques to escape the thinking brain. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, this practice has been shown to decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression. Mantras, which are the repetition of a word or a phrase, can also be used in conjunction with meditation. Studies have shown these repetition exercises can have soothing effects that may help reduce the symptoms of anxiety disorders and improve spiritual well-being. (Madhav Goyal, et al., 2014)

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HM3 Justin Manipon

General Duty Corpsman

What I like to do to combat stress anytime is to try and relax, take a deep breath, and maybe read a book. Exercising, it's a really big stress reliever for me, especially because it's a good place for me to actually get mad, lift some weights and just get all my anger out. After that I usually feel 100% better. I'd tell my patients the exact same thing, read a book, write, and maybe write down your thoughts and feelings, that's a really good one. Or just go to the gym; go for a run, any type of exercise; that helps clear the mind.



LT Brendan Ringhouse

VMFA-232 Flight Surgeon

To battle stress in myself and my squadron I will recognize it as a natural part of life in and out of the military and encourage the Marines and Sailors to discuss it freely, without fear of stigma. I will assure those struggling with stress and those around them that it is completely normal to seek help and it should be encouraged to prevent further injury. Doing so can improve our readiness and our ability to complete our mission.



LT Keith West

Division Officer, Primary Care

I'd say leading a healthy lifestyle and being active in your lifestyle. However, that's not always an option for everybody, so more of a positive lifestyle; have positive thoughts, think of the greener grass, not always think of the negativity or the past, [the future] could be brighter around the next bend or corner.



Technology has caught up with these ancient practices and today's high-tech tools can help calm a wandering mind. Unlike meditating in silence, when you're using technology in the form of apps or streams, you need to be your own deejay and choose the program before you start. Beginners should start by sampling various programs to determine which best suits their style and preferences: music, soothing voiceover (male or female), chants, counting, tones, and much more.

There are thousands of live streams and apps for meditating. Some will calm you down, others will energize you. It's about finding one that works for you. Start with breathing and focusing the mind to creating a habit of consistent mindfulness meditation. When you do want to experiment with a meditation app, follow the steps below.

Step 1: Make sure phone and computer alerts are silenced. It's best to move to a room that has the least amount of technology as possible. You will only need one device to play your meditation tool. Find a seat close to your tablet or smart phone and get comfortable. Have a sense of how long you'll be sitting. Most meditation times are around seven to 15 minutes. Dimming the lights or darkening the room may help you clear your mind.

Step 2: Start breathing. Try to clear your mind: The app may guide you to a single point of focus. However, even as you're coached into concentration, your mind may wander and your body will resist the act of keeping still. Acknowledge these thoughts, and let your mind go there.

Step 3: Repeat. Know that it's okay to stumble. Don't worry if your mind wanders. Once your mind gets a taste of stillness, the frustration of losing focus will be easier to accept. Even the most experienced meditator has to start over from time to time.

The act of meditation is an ancient practice that may require years to perfect. Modern technology can now help some people achieve that state of stillness. With technology, we can change the way we create awareness of psychological issues and improve mental health care through traditional and alternative methods. The broad range of methods allows providers and organizations to ensure a ready and resilient fighting force.

Madhav Goyal, M. M., Sonal Singh, M. M., Erica M. S. Siginga, M. M., Neda F. Gould, P., Anastasia Rowland-Seymour, M., Ritu Sharma, B., et al. (2014, March). Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being; A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 174(3), 357-368.

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**Senior Strategic
 Communications Specialist**

Jenny Collins

Graphic Design

Randy Reyes

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